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ABSTRACT

Most teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) face a number of challenges: large and heterogeneous classes, specialized student needs, and poor funding and employment continuity. Many work part time, often in more than one program and serving simultaneously as administrator and teacher. While most have college degrees, their training is likely to be in other areas, with little training specifically for ESL instruction. Need for certification in the field is growing. However, few models of comprehensive professional development for adult ESL literacy teachers exist to support the credentialing process. Three models hold promise: a craft or mentoring model, in which inexperienced teachers are paired with experienced teachers; an applied science model, in which relevant research is linked with practical experience; and an inquiry-based model, in which research, teacher education, and teaching occur concurrently. There is much to recommend a combination of the three models, bringing together teachers and other practitioners at all stages of professional development to provide a laboratory for demonstrating and expanding knowledge,skills, and experience. Expansion of professional development for adult ESL literacy teachers will also require changes in adult education policy and practice and a research base in adult ESL literacy. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Creating a Professional Workforce in Adult ESL Literacy.

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Creating a Professional Workforce in Adult ESL Literacy

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The challenges faced by many adult English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy teachers are great enough to work against the advancement of the profession itself. Classes are often large and made up of students of varying ability levels. Instruction may include basic literacy, family literacy, workplace literacy, or any number of specialized areas within the field. Funding is intermittent, limiting continuity of employment and opportunities for professional growth. At the same time, the demand for ESL instruction for adults is increasing (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Although it is clear that professional, well-prepared teachers are needed now more than ever, several factors mitigate against the development of such a workforce. The majority of adult ESL literacy instructors work part time, without contracts or benefits. Often they are volunteers. Many receive only the most limited professional preparation and then leave the field after a short period of time (Crandall, 1993).

This digest explores the issue of professionalism in adult ESL literacy. It describes the current conditions of the ESL workforce, it discusses the role credentialing and certification might play in the professionalization process, and it highlights several professional development models the field might consider to help create a professional workforce.

Professional Development: Limited Opportunities

Most adult ESL literacy instructors work part time. Many work in several programs at once, each requiring different knowledge and skills. Those who are full time are likely to function as both program administrators and teachers. Thus, it is not surprising that the turnover among ESL practitioners is great. One survey of adult literacy practitioners in New York reported that a majority had been in the field for three years or fewer (Metis Associates, 1986). These educators reported being greatly concerned about the need for full-time employment with benefits, more job stability, better program resources, and more opportunities for professional development.

While most ESL literacy teachers have college degrees, the degrees may be in various fields. Those with degrees in education are likely to be prepared to teach children or adolescents, not adults. Those with degrees in reading may have had little preparation for teaching literacy in a second language. And, until recently, even the M.A. programs for ESL educators (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Applied Linguistics) focused on the needs of elementary, secondary, or university students, not on adults with limited education. For many adult ESL teachers, staff development consists of voluntary attendance at workshops, conferences, or seminars for a day or two per year (Kutner, 1992; Tibbetts, Kutner, Hemphill, & Jones, 1991). Literacy volunteers, working in a one-to-one tutoring situation, often receive only 15 to 20 hours of preparation during the first year of teaching, with even less training in subsequent years (Tibbetts, et al., 1991).

The Role of Credentialing or Certification

The great demand for adult ESL literacy education and the diverse needs of adult ESL literacy learners have forced the profession to engage in a delicate balancing act in deciding who is qualified to teach. While concerns about professionalizing teaching are addressed by calls for strong academic credentials, credentialed teachers who understand literacy issues and have experience teaching language to minority adults are difficult to find (and to keep). The field grapples with ensuring competence and fostering professionalism "without establishing rigid certification requirements that deny professional opportunities for good teachers who lack academic credentials" (Wrigley & Guth, 1992, p.196).

The concern for professionalization of the field has led many to suggest the need for some kind of certification process involving participation in university courses. Others, however, point out that credentialing may be more appropriate for the field. Credentialing (involving demonstration of proficiency) would allow for multiple routes of access to adult ESL literacy teaching and would also serve to validate practitioners' existing knowledge, skills, and experiences. Practitioners with what Auerbach (1992, p. 28) refers to as "formal qualifications," including knowledge of theories of first and second language literacy, may have limited experience working in linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Conversely, members of these communities with informal qualifications, including understanding learners and the potential uses and contexts for literacy in their communities, may have limited theoretical knowledge. Ideally, both types could learn from each other and create a workforce that "mirrors the diversity" [of adult ESL learners] "and the diversity of contexts in which they seek to learn" (Lytle, Belzer, & Reumann, 1992, p.9).

Models for Effective Professional Development

Although many believe that credentialing could play a valuable role in the field, there are few models of comprehensive professional development for adult ESL literacy teachers that might lead to a credentialing process. This section uses a framework developed by Wallace in his work with foreign language teachers (cited in Wrigley & Guth, 1992) to suggest three promising models for professional development. They include a craft or mentoring model, in which inexperienced teachers are paired with experienced teachers; an applied science model, in which relevant research is linked with practical experience; and an inquiry-based model, in which research, teacher education, and teaching occur concurrently. Ways of combining these models to provide a true learning laboratory are also discussed.

The **craft** or **mentoring model** relies on the knowledge of an experienced practitioner to mentor less experienced practitioners. In the refugee education programs in Southeast Asia, host country teachers collaborate with one another and with a master teacher to

develop lesson plans and share ideas for classroom activities. At City University of New York, master teachers open up their Adult Basic Education (ABE)/ESL classes to less experienced colleagues who are reimbursed for observing demonstration lessons. In K-12 education, alternative or "fast-track" certification programs are available to attract both under-represented minority groups and math and science professionals to teaching. These programs involve a summer orientation followed by a series of mentoring and other support activities during the first year of teaching. Returning Peace Corps volunteers with extensive experience in fields such as English language teaching can also enroll in alternative certification programs. A comparable program could be developed for potential adult ESL literacy teachers who have undergraduate degrees in related fields but lack specific education or appropriate teaching experience, as well as for community members who have valuable teaching and cultural experience but lack a background in theory and research.

The **applied science** or **"from theory to practice" model** links relevant research with teaching practice. The Adult ESL Teacher Training Institute, developed for California, has been implemented in many other states. Instruction consists of a series of sequenced, skill-based training sessions involving the use of video training packages by trainers who are experienced teachers and certified by the Institute (Savage, 1992). Video, satellite telecommunications, and other technology now make it possible for this model to be offered through distance education. Through video segments on teaching techniques and administrative strategies, Los Angeles County is using its Educational Telecommunications Network to provide training for adult ESL literacy teachers and administrators. A similar set of videotapes on exemplary programs has been developed by the author and her colleagues at the Center for Applied Linguistics. (*Sharing What Works* is available from NCLE at the address on the preceding page.)

The **inquiry** or **"reflective teaching" model** is an exciting approach in which teachers become active researchers—reading about, sharing, observing, critically analyzing, and reflecting upon their own practice in order to improve it. This model involves teachers in all stages of research, from determining the questions to be investigated, identifying research methods, and analyzing results, to reflecting on what changes in practice the results might indicate. At the Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Research Project in Philadelphia (Lytle et al., 1992), teachers participate in an ongoing seminar where they share what they have learned from developing and using alternative assessment tools in the classroom, examining learning strategies of students, and completing other practice-based projects. At the University of Massachusetts Bilingual Community Literacy Project, teachers in three well-established, community-based adult literacy programs and faculty of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, research ways of creating closer links with the communities in which the programs are located and of involving more community members as teachers.

Professional development schools provide an exciting example of how a combination of the three models in one setting brings together aspiring and experienced teachers, teacher educators, and others involved in education to learn from one another (President's Commission on Teacher Education, 1992). Here, specially designated elementary or secondary schools serve as loci for research and improvement of practice by teachers and other school personnel who work collaboratively with university teacher educators.

There is much to recommend the use of a **combination model** for the improvement of adult ESL literacy education. The principle would be the same—to bring together teachers and other practitioners at all stages of their development to provide a laboratory (in a community center, worksite, or adult education program) where they could demonstrate and expand their knowledge, skills, and experiences. TESOL teacher educators and applied linguists would have much-needed, authentic adult education contexts in which to test both theory and practice; beginning teachers would be provided with both formal education and opportunities to learn from their experiences; and more experienced teachers would serve as mentors, conduct research related to their own classes, and reflect upon and share their experiences.

Conclusion

Expanding the professional development opportunities available to ESL literacy teachers will require changes in adult education policy and practice. Good models of credentialing and certification and of comprehensive professional development do exist. An exploration of these models leading to their implementation would help to create a better trained workforce while simultaneously building a much-needed research base in adult ESL literacy. In so doing, a major step would be taken towards achieving the professionalism so needed in the field.

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